

Legal Environment

Freedom of the press is enshrined in the constitution and is generally respected in practice. However, libel remains a criminal offense. In February 2014, the government amended Trinidad's Libel and Defamation Act to abolish "malicious defamatory libel" as a criminal offense; however, it preserved "malicious defamatory libel known to be false." The Media Association of Trinidad and Tobago expressed concern, saying passage of the amendment without full decriminalization could continue to limit press freedom, since journalists still face the threat of heavy fines and up to two years' imprisonment under the remaining provisions.

Journalists are also subject to exorbitant civil libel judgments. In April 2014, a High Court judge ordered the *Trinidad Express* newspaper to pay Ken Julien, former president of the University of Trinidad and Tobago, over \$500,000 in damages for articles criticizing his management of the university. The award was one of the highest ever for a defamation case in Trinidad and Tobago.

In May 2014, the Cybercrime Bill was introduced in Parliament. Press freedom advocates criticized a number of the bill's provisions, which included jail time and fines for defamatory online content and rules requiring internet service providers to disclose customer information under court order. However, the bill stalled in Parliament in July, and had not passed by year's end.

While freedom of information legislation is in place, the government has been criticized for gradually narrowing the categories of public information that are available under the law.

Political Environment

There were no reports of physical attacks on journalists in 2014. However, several journalists faced threats and harassment. Mark Bassant, an investigative reporter for the Caribbean Communications Network, was forced to flee the country in May 2014 after learning that criminals had put a bounty on his head in connection with his investigation into the murder of former politician Dana Seetahal. Acting police commissioner Stephen Williams said Bassant had made irresponsible comments, which sparked a debate in the country about the police commissioner's lack of support for Bassant, with some calling for Williams to resign. Bassant returned to Trinidad and Tobago in late July to continue reporting, and his case remained ongoing at year's end. Also in July, a TV journalist and his cameraman reported that soldiers had pointed their weapons at them and threatened their lives after the two attempted to record the soldiers, who were accused of abusing residents while on patrol in the capital.

Economic Environment

There are three daily newspapers—*Trinidad Express*, *Newsday*, and the *Trinidad Guardian*—and three political weeklies, all of which are privately owned. About a dozen television stations are in operation, including the state-owned Caribbean New Media Group (CNMG), though the privately owned TV6 dominates ratings. There are several dozen radio stations, including three operated by CNMG. The government and state-owned businesses disproportionately place their advertising with state-owned media and private outlets that favor the government. Several outlets reported that the government withheld official

advertising in 2014 as a result of their critical reporting. There are no government restrictions on the internet, which was accessed by 65 percent of the population in 2014.